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CATAWBA COUNTY RECEIVES FIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS FROM NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

NEWTON, N.C. – Five Catawba County programs representing four departments have received 2016 National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Awards.

For the past 45 years, NACo has recognized innovative county government programs through its annual Achievement Awards program. Since the program's inception, Catawba County has received one or more awards every year with a total of more than 200 to date.

"NACo awards demonstrate Catawba County's continuing effort to find innovative and creative ways to deliver sound, efficient services to our citizens," said Randy Isenhower, Chair of the Catawba County Board of Commissioners. "My fellow commissioners and I are very proud of County staff and pleased with these awards."

The Catawba County Library System was presented with an award for **TechConnect**, a space where citizens explore and learn about technology, improve digital literacy, and gain hands-on experience with professional design and engineering tools. The TechConnect space offers low- to no-cost public access to resources like GoPro cameras, 3D scanners and printers, digital cutters, and sewing machines, ensuring equitable access to technologies that enrich and improve lives through open access to information, communication, and technology services. Equipped with both Windows and Apple products and staffed by a dedicated digital services librarian, TechConnect programs include training workshops and one-on-one assistance.

The Tax Office was presented with an award for the **Educators of Revaluation** initiative created to streamline property value appeals. Every four years, Reappraisal staff establishes updated property values for all real property countywide, and property owners have the right to appeal these values within certain parameters. Recently, staff collaborated to design and implement a uniform, transparent, detailed presentation of the revaluation process, shifting from a predominantly written narrative format to a more dynamic visual approach. Feedback from taxpayers and the Board of Equalization and Review (the local board responsible for settling value appeals) indicated that the new process results in greater understanding among citizens and Board members and a higher degree of professionalism and consistency. These enhancements would not have been possible without Reappraisal staff's talents, initiative, and customer focus.

Catawba County Social Services was honored with two awards. The first acknowledges Social Services' success in training staff in the **Trauma Informed Practice** model, an integrated, holistic approach to child welfare that emphasizes safety, permanency, and the importance of dealing with the short- and long-term effects of trauma. Through this approach, a multi-disciplinary staff team administers screening tools, functional assessments, and training to child welfare caseworkers, supervisors, and foster parents to help identify and manage situations in which trauma may be involved. The initiative includes Clinical/Behavioral Health services, as appropriate, and an in-home parenting education program focusing on substance abuse, trauma, domestic violence, and mental health. This has resulted in better outcomes for children and youth receiving these services.

The second award recognized Social Services' creation of a **web-based portal for emancipated youth** who are aging out of foster care. Developed by Foster Care and Technology staff, the portal provides a place to store and access critical documents they may need as they transition to adulthood, such as Social Security and Medicaid cards, immunization and school records, and birth certificates. In the past, youth were provided hard copies of important documents that, if lost or misplaced, resulted in delays in accessing services and getting replacement documents. In addition to providing a secure storage space for these documents, the portal provides links to other helpful resources. As a result, the portal has enhanced services while also saving time and frustration for newly emancipated youth.

Information Technology was recognized for the **Performance Dashboard**, an interactive web-based tool that provides graphs, narratives, and performance indicators to organize information about Catawba County in an easy-to-access format. This comprehensive dashboard provides employees, citizens, and people interested in Catawba County a clean and intuitive tool to see data, including County demographics, County Government services, and the status of County performance in key goal areas, all in one place on any web-connected device and in a format that is uniquely scaled for that device. This tool was developed in-house by a team of Catawba County Government employees from the Technology, Budget, and Finance departments, which has saved approximately \$80,000 per year in recurring costs.

Catawba County's NACo Awards will be presented to County officials during the Association's annual conference in Los Angeles in July. Employees involved in the five programs will also be recognized at an upcoming Board of Commissioners meeting and at the annual County Awards Night dinner in October.

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